

PM words marking the fourth anniversary of the Ukraine war: 24 February 2026

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Prime Minister Keir Starmer's words marking the fourth anniversary of the Ukraine war.

Good morning, colleagues. And before we get into our usual business today, I just wanted to say a few words to mark the four years of the conflict in Ukraine. That's four years of Putin aggression. Four long years and four long years of suffering in Ukraine. And, you will have your own images and memories of that suffering.

I've got three etched in my mind. The first is in the early days when I went to Kyiv after conflict broke out, I went to Bucha, which is just outside Kyiv, and saw for myself the roads and the ditches in which Ukrainian civilians were handcuffed with their hands behind their back, blindfolded and shot in the head and the bodies left in the road.

I'd seen the images on film, but I went to see for myself the actual place and talked to the communities there. It was their families. It was their brothers and sisters. It was their communities. And they were left, as they described to me, to pick up the bodies, put them in shopping trolleys and take them to the local church where they put them in a mass grave.

The second etched in my memory was last year when I went to one of the busiest hospitals in Kyiv and saw for myself the incredibly awful burns on some of those who had returned from the frontline, the like of which I'd never seen in my life before. And at the same time, I went to a primary school to meet children who were five, six, seven years old, and had lost both their parents to the conflict.

There will be many examples, including the recent attacks on the energy system, when was -18 degrees and left people freezing in their homes. But that is the suffering inflicted by the aggression of Putin. My message to you, the Cabinet, and to the country today, as we mark this four years, is that we stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes.

I wanted also to pay tribute to the incredible resilience of the Ukrainians. And it is incredible resilience. When this conflict broke out four years ago, it was assumed it would be a matter of weeks before Putin took the whole of Ukraine. That's what everybody believed to be the case. Four years later, the Ukrainians are holding out against that aggression. Holding out on the front line where the circumstances are extremely challenging, but also holding out in the civilian life, where every day Ukrainians get up and go to work as a sign of resilience and defiance of the aggression.

And, we must defeat the falsehood that Russia is winning. Because if you take the last year alone, Russia took 0.8% of land in Ukraine at a terrible cost to themselves of half a million losses. So we pay tribute to the resilience of Ukrainians. We all want a just and lasting peace. And that is what we're all working so hard for.

It must be just. And it must be lasting. That's why we set up a coalition of the willing a year ago, to do the work that was necessary on security guarantees. And I'm chairing a meeting of the Coalition of the Willing, immediately after this Cabinet to try and take that work further forward. But let's be clear in terms of getting to that just and lasting peace, it is Putin who is standing in the way.

Zelenskyy has shown willing. He's taken the lead. It is Putin who is standing in the way. And that's why we must always double down on our support for Ukraine. That means capability. It means

resource. It means more sanctions. And today, I'm pleased that we're announcing the biggest package since 2022. In terms of sanctions package. That's 300 Russian energy companies that are being targeted.

And we're doing a lot more work on the shadow fleet, which is essential in terms of weakening the ability of Russia to continue with this aggression.

And then finally this, because this is not a remote conflict a long way away from the United Kingdom. It's about us on so many levels. It's about our values of freedom, democracy, and the right of a country to decide for itself what it does, which is democracy and sovereignty.

It has already impacted us over and above the work we've done on capability, resource sanctions, etc., because it has hit every family with the cost of living. Energy prices doubled at the beginning of this conflict. They're still 40% higher than they were before the conflict. And so every family is feeling this, and how and when this conflict ends is going to affect everybody in the United Kingdom, for a very long time, which is why it's so important that we make sure that there's a just and lasting peace.

And Ukraine is very much the frontline of our freedom, but we need to bear that in mind as we lost four years since the outbreak of this conflict. Thank you, colleagues.

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